



"AND SHE PULLED AT THE STRING OF THE WITCH-WIFE'S DOOR,
AND SHE DREW BACK THE BOLT BELOW."

THE BALLAD OF THE PARSON'S DAUGHTER.

(A tale of 1693.)

BY HELEN GRAY CONE.



HEY had taken away old
Goodwife Crook,
Though she did
whine and cower;
They said she had
writ in the Black
Man's Book,
And she wielded a
wicked power.

They said she had ridden her broom of
birch,
In the moonlight cold and pale,
Right over the steeple that crowned the
church;
So the old wife lay in jail.

'T was the Parson's daughter, whose name
was Grace,
With a maiden that was her friend,
Walked forth one day to the lonely place
By the wood at the township's end.

And they talked in whispers of this and
that
Which of late was come to pass;
And there fell a chill, as the shadows flat
Crept longer across the grass.

And now they were nigh to the straw-
thatched hut
Where the witch had lived alone,
And above and below the door was shut;
But they heard a grievous moan!

A long, low moan, and a wailing cry;
And they paused in the path, aghast—
And they looked around with the white of
the eye,
And they held each other fast.

Said the Deacon's Prue, with a waxen face,
"Come hence, for I die with fear!"
But "Alas and alack!" said the Parson's
Grace,
"'T was a pitiful sound to hear!"

(Her ways were not as the Parson's ways,
And the ways of the Parson's flock;
She was fair as a single flower that sways
From the cleft of the grim gray rock.)

"And, indeed," said she, "whatsoever it be,
Though an evil thing in pain,
I feel in my heart it is laid on me
That it shall not cry in vain!"

Said the Deacon's Prudence, "Oh, touch
not pitch,
Lest you should be defiled!
What should you do in the house of the
witch,
That are your father's child?"

Then the Parson's Grace said no word
more;
But she went up somewhat slow,
And she pulled at the string of the witch-
wife's door,
And she drew back the bolt below.

She heard no longer the doleful cries
As she stood in the twilight room;
But she was aware of two fiery eyes,
Green-glaring through the gloom.

"Heaven help me now at my need!" said she,
And her heart went pit-a-pat;
But the strange thing came and rubbed at
her knee,
And it was but the old wife's cat.

He was scared and starved, he was lean and
lone;

His coat was a brindled gray;

He was lame from a stone that a lad had
thrown

When they hustled the witch away.

At the feet of the maiden he fawned and
rolled,

And he mewed, and he pulled her gown;

And she lapped him about in her apron's
fold,

And she carried him back to town.

"'T is a fiend," cried Prue, with her wax-
white face,

"That you hold so fast in arm!"

"'T is a creature of God," said the parson's
Grace,

"And it shall not come to harm!"

When the people's folly began to fail,

And the trials at last were done,

Old Goodwife Crook came out of the jail,

And blinked in the broad, bright sun.

With her stick she hobbled along the street,
And again by her hearth she sat;

"But where," she cried, "is my deary sweet —
Oh, where is my brindled cat?"

"My good gray Dickon, that loved me so,
Mine only friend?" she said.

She rocked to and fro, and she whimpered
low,

And she waggled her old gray head.

Then the Parson's Grace, with her sun-
bright face,

Came in at the old wife's door;

And lo, and behold! in her apron's fold
The brindled cat she bore!

(Her ways were not as the Parson's ways,

And the ways of the parson's flock;

She was fair as a single flower that sways
From the cleft of the grim gray rock:

As the harebell blue, that takes its hue

From the heart of the heaven above;

Her eyes were full of the light of her soul,

And her soul was full of love!)

